



The Catholic Servant

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A Tool for Evangelization, Catechesis and Apologetics
I did not come to be served, but to serve. Matthew 20:28

Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, humor will be with the Pope

By John Sondag



Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine
There's always laughter and good red wine,
At least, I've always found it so,
Benedicamus Domino!
-By Hilaire Belloc

Sondag

[Editor's note: On Divine Mercy Sunday, May 1, 2011, the Catholic Church will beatify Pope John Paul II. This April (2011) edition of "The Catholic Servant" is dedicated to the life and works of this great Pope.]

I just love some of the anecdotal stories of Pope John Paul II. They tell us so much about the character and sanctity of this great man, and many of them cause us to chuckle, cry, or laugh, which fits the Catholic sun with laughter and good wine.

One of the first times I think I saw Pope John Paul II was when he was installed as Pope. I watched the Mass on TV, and at the end of the Mass, the crowds started to cheer. He didn't just wave or bless the crowds in St. Peter's Square. He took his crosier which had a crucifix on its top and repeatedly raised it high in the air toward the different sections of the gathered people as if to proclaim Jesus Christ.

These gestures were strong, bold, and full

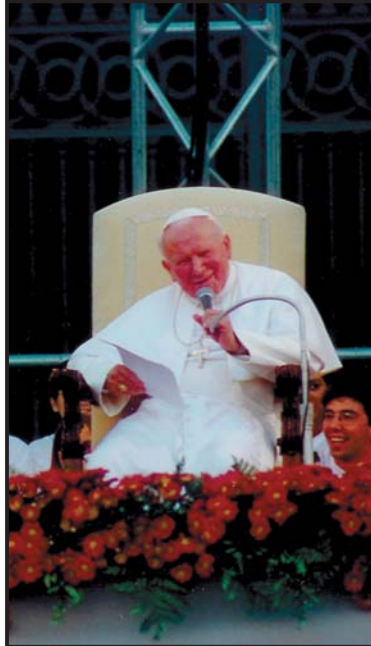


Photo by Matt Blomquist

of energy. This was no frail, old man who was going to occupy the Chair of Peter, an office which had been held by older men for decades. Pope John Paul's action clearly indi-

cated a traditional love of the cross emblazoned with fresh stamina. The vigor of his gestures could not go unnoticed.

This was no ordinary Cardinal who had become Pope, and his exemplary life and many talents began to provide the next two decades and six years with stories that fascinate, entertain, and inspire.

For instance, in *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II, there is the story of the priest friend who wanted to give the young Fr. Karol Wojtyla a new shaving kit for a present. He knew he had to go to Fr. Wojtyla's place and throw out the old shaving kit, because if he didn't, Fr. Wojtyla would continue to use the old one and give the new one away.

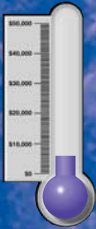
The next three stories are related to Fr. Wojtyla's intellectual prowess. Most people, if they're intelligent enough, will receive one doctorate. Not so with the future Pope—he had earned two doctorates—one in theology from Rome and one in philosophy from Poland.

A fact that I recently learned about his first doctoral dissertation is that after Fr. Wojtyla wrote it, he didn't have enough money to publish it. So, the Roman university did not award the degree. He received the degree for that dissertation a year later from a Polish university.

However, the second dissertation in philosophy was written in Polish. When he finished the dissertation, it was "heavy" to say the

Pope's humor continued page 8

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Interview: Abby Johnson, former director of a Planned Parenthood clinic

By Genevieve Pollock



Abby Johnson

[Editor's note: This interview was originally published by Zenit.org and is being reprinted with permission by ZENIT. We are pleased to note that Abby Johnson will be the keynote speaker at a fund-raising banquet for Pregnancy Choices Lifecare Center on May 5, 2011. For more information, call 952-236-8936.]

BRYAN, Texas, FEB. 14, 2011 Zenit.org- Abby Johnson's compassion for women in crisis drove her to work in Planned Parenthood, but its promotion of abortion and birth control soon raised questions about the women's true needs.

The former Planned Parenthood
Abby Johnson
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Interview: Jim Towey, former legal counsel of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

By John Sondag



Jim Towey

[Editor's Note: Jim Towey is the new CEO of Ave Maria University in Florida. He served as the legal counsel for Mother Teresa of Calcutta and was head of the Faith Base Initiatives under President Bush. He was recently in the Twin Cities to give an address at the University of St. Thomas Law School.]

"The Catholic Servant":
In your many dealings with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, what impressed you most about her?

Jim Towey: That she was so focused. She knew what she

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta
continued page 10

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Bringing the Faith into the home Pope John Paul II: "Penance is not just an effort, a weight, but it is also a joy."

By Niki Kalpakgian



Kalpakgian

For my thirtieth birthday last year, a group of acquaintances realized days after that they had missed this milestone. Approaching me a few days after the fact, they expressed a desire to plan something special to celebrate and asked, "What did I want to do?" Mentioning that I hoped to spend a day in the city and visit an art gallery, they agreed and a date was set.

As the outing approached I connected with one of the organizers to confirm transportation and timing. Imagine my shock when she stated that a friend was visiting for a week from an hour and a half away, arriving the night of the outing, so she was sure no one wanted to attend anymore. There went my big birthday plan! But, she offered, we already have another gathering planned on Tuesday night, so you could just come then and we'll celebrate for you. With the focus now off myself and on others' convenience and desires, the affect was diminished; I knew the celebration wasn't really about my birthday or me.

I'm sure we've all had disappointments in life and felt let down. In examining and thinking about that in-

stance, it caused me to reflect on the whole notion of giving gifts. It is said that true gifts come from the heart, but I would take it one step further and say that a real gift keeps in mind the receiver. Oftentimes we give presents we would like to receive, but we should step back and ask if the present is ideal for the beneficiary.

Recently, many friends have been discussing the "Five Love Languages," popularized by author Dr. Gary Chapman. In his words, the languages are: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. A person can take the online test to find their primary "love language"—how they prefer to be shown love. But the fun doesn't stop there: once your language is understood you have to then interpret the "language" of your spouse, family, or friend. Once the appropriate language of the other is realized, they should be loved in that way.

In light of the spiritual life and the current season of Lent, this notion of gifts and giving takes on a whole new meaning. During this Church season it is customary to give up certain things or offer additional sacrifices to prepare the heart and mind for the Paschal Mystery. Looking at my own life, I often give up things that I love during these forty days, namely coffee and dessert. Additionally I try to add a daily devotional practice such as praying the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Reflecting on these

penances, they are beneficial to my faith walk but in some ways they are not too demanding in the sense that they are sacrifices I have chosen, commonly known as active mortifications. True, they are practices I commit to for forty days, but when the decision is ours we feel in control.

Stepping back I thought about those times in my life when I felt out of control: physical suffering, mental anguish, difficult personal situations, grappling with loss and stress or uncertainty. It seems that at these moments the faithful are called to embrace the hardship as a sacrifice—albeit one that is imposed rather than chosen. Named passive mortifications, they present themselves to us without our looking for them; it seems harder to accept these situations because they aren't part of our plan; they arrive without forewarning and affect us deeply. Saying, "I plan to give up alcohol for Lent" involves a different degree of the will than dealing with the unexpected loss of a loved one.

But sometimes the gift the Lord wants from us at that moment in time is precisely that further, harder act of penance.

This notion takes on a whole new meaning for me as I enter into my eighth month of a difficult pregnancy. I feel as if I am a shadow of the person I once was: unable to do the things I like, eat the things I wish, and achieve the goals I'm used to attaining. But, this is

where the Lord has called me for the past eight months. It would be much easier to say, "I won't eat meat every Friday and I'll pray the Rosary each day." That would be my choice and wouldn't affect the whole of my existence. But life, especially the Christian life, doesn't work like that.

Recalling the words of the late Pope John Paul II in his 1979 Lenten Message, we are reminded of the ultimate goal of our mortifications—active and passive: "Penance is not just an effort, a weight, but it is also a joy. Sometimes it is a great joy of the human spirit, a delight that other sources cannot bring forth ... the whole period of Lent—since it is a preparation for Easter—is a systematic call to this joy that comes from the effort of patiently finding oneself again. Let no one be afraid to undertake this effort."

As we examine the gifts we offer to God and others it is helpful to keep in mind the one to whom we are giving, because when our offering is in line with others' desires the presentation is truly from the heart.

Niki Kalpakgian is a wife, mother, and freelance writer currently living in Gaming, Austria.

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Scriptural background for the Sacraments: Part IX

The early Church wrestles with Jewish practices and the importance of Baptism

By Fr. John Paul Echert



Fr. Echert

Last month we concluded our consideration with the dramatic conversion and Baptism of Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Now we turn to another pillar of the apostolic Church, Saint Peter, who as the Vicar of Christ would have an indispensable role in approving and advancing the divine plan to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Acts of the Apostles records this pivotal event involving a godly Gentile and the chief Apostle:

"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the

Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' And he stared at him in terror, and said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa." (Acts 10:1-8)

Meanwhile, as they were on their journey to Joppa, the fol-

lowing took place:

"Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the Heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.' This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to Heaven." (Acts 10:9-16)

Peter was perplexed and pondering the meaning of the mystical vision; meanwhile, the envoys from Cornelius arrived in search of the Apostle. The Holy Spirit directed Saint Peter to accompany the three men back to Caesarea. Once there, Cornelius recounted his own vision and directive from an angel, to which the Apostle responded:

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. You know the word which He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), the word which

was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached... To Him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.'

"While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days." (Acts 10:34-37, 43-48)

So by divine intervention and supernatural revelation, the two great pillars of the early Church, Peter and Paul, knew with certitude that Baptism was to be freely offered to believing Gentiles. Still, among some conservative Jewish Christians, there was opposition to this view and insistence that in addition to Baptism, the administration of circumcision was binding upon the Gentiles for covenant inclusion and salvation. This was potentially a very divisive issue that confronted Christianity, and so the first-ever Church Council was

convened at Jerusalem, circa 50 A.D. As Pope, it was Peter who spoke first:

"The Apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. And God Who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'" (Acts 15:6-11)

Following this speech, the missionary Apostles Paul and Barnabas related to the assembly the signs and wonders that God had accomplished through them among the Gentiles. Finally, the Apostle James, leader of the local church at Jerusalem, spoke:

"My judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from [fornication] and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.'" (Acts 15:19-21)

The official decision of this Apostolic Council should have put the matter to rest, but as history would show, there will always be some who reject the authority of the Church and continue in error. In this case we know that a certain element of ultra-conservative Jewish Christians, commonly referred to as Judaizers for their desire to impose passé Jewish customs upon Gentile converts, continued to undermine the truth of the Gospel by their insistence that faith in Christ followed by Baptism was insufficient for salvation.

Fr. John Paul Echert, S.S.L., is the pastor of Holy Trinity Church and St. Augustine Church in South St. Paul, Minnesota.

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— Catechism on the Priesthood, St. John Vianney —

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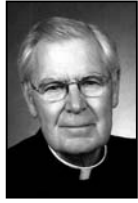
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Question and Answer

Pope John Paul II and the fall of Communism: hope for pro-life movement

By Fr. James Reidy



Question:
Is there hope for the pro-life cause today?

Answer:
Much hope. When the March for Life took place in

Washington last January, I was reading the concluding volume of George Weigel's two-part biography of Pope John Paul II. The first section of this volume recounts the Pope's triumph over the Communist regime in his native Poland beginning in 1979. Putting two and two together, one can see there something very encouraging about the pro-life movement today. One can see a parallel between what the sheer force of truth proclaimed by Pope John Paul accomplished then and what that same force of truth can accomplish today.

As Weigel describes it, Poland had been living in the "Communist culture of the lie." Communism was constructed on the foundation of an inhumanly false philosophy—state-imposed Marxist materialism—and was being maintained by "an official strategy of lies." Weigel recalls a joke going around in Poland at the time that captures this unreal culture of the lie. A Communist Party boss asks, "How much is 2+2?" A worker answers, "How much would you like it to be?"

What finally happened shows that human nature and human society, especially in a Catholic culture like Poland, can exist on lies for just so long. The Polish people were sick of the lies; they were aching for the truth to be told and that the truth would make

them free again. The spark that set them alight was Pope John Paul II when he came to them in 1979 and for nine days spoke to millions of his countrymen who gathered to hear him with tears in their eyes and an awakened hope in their hearts. He urged them over and over again to "live in the truth," the truth of faith, the truth of human dignity, freedom, and solidarity. And with that was born the Solidarity resistance movement of workers and intellectuals which in ten years' time would sweep the communist regime into the dustbin of history. Pope John Paul had made it plain to his countrymen that it was not to be by violence that they would achieve their freedom but by living the truth and witnessing to the truth in the teeth of the oppressor's lies. And that is how it happened. There was more than one cause, but it is generally agreed that more than anything else, it was the inspiration of a courageous pope who proved that these lies could not stand in the face of a people who in conscience were determined to resist them and be free.

It was the seemingly invincible Communist police state that crumbled in Poland and then everywhere in Europe, eventually in Russia itself. Looking back, people thought that the Communist lie had such a strangle hold on so much of the world that they could not see how it would ever end. It has ended in much of the world by now, and from that blessed fact, hope can spring for the end of another lie that has a deadly hold on our society.

For the culture of death, like Communism, is a culture of the lie. The whole abortion industry is based on lies: the lie that abortion is just a matter

of choice regardless of what is chosen; the lie that a woman has a right to control her own body, meaning that she can kill her unborn child; the lie that what is called a fetus is not the beginning of a human life, not the start of a baby; the lie that the child being aborted feels no pain; the lie that abortion can have no devastating emotional effect on the life of the mother—all terrible lies! And in this list of lies we must, to our shame, include these: that in good conscience Catholic politicians can receive the Eucharist and yet support abortion, and in good conscience Catholics can be pro-abortion at the polls.

As for the parallel with what happened in Europe, thanks to Pope John Paul II, it becomes clear when we look at the witness to truth of the pro-life forces in America today, a witness not unlike that of the truth-telling pope and the people he inspired to live in the truth. To begin with, take the 23 Life-Care Centers in our metro area. In my neighborhood, the Highland Life-Care Center counsels expectant mothers in the truth about abortion, and babies are saved. Mothers find material help for the needs of their babies, informal training for parenting is offered, and counsel and referrals are given toward healing for women scarred by abortion. Mass is regularly offered in the chapel of the center, visits are made to the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day, and rosaries are recited outside the Planned Parenthood abortion facility one door away. Outside, too, are sidewalk counselors from Pro-Life Action Ministries urging all who come there to think again about what they are about to do and offering alternatives. This is an ongoing witness

bravely given by the men and women of Pro-Life Action Ministries throughout the city, most notably at Regions Hospital, where they participate with many others in the nationwide 40 Days for Life. Their latest newsletter reports that 93 babies were saved from abortion in 2010.

Equally encouraging in this witness to the truth are all the pro-life organizations in this country. Locally, we have in addition to the two mentioned above, PROLIFE Across AMERICA, "the billboard people," whose billboards with their gentle reminders of the truth (like a baby with its eyes closed saying: "I could dream before I was born.") are changing minds and hearts throughout this country. Then we have Birthright and Cradle of Hope giving much the same kind of aid to mothers and babies as the Life-Care centers. And, of course Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life and the Human Life Alliance work to educate and change laws. All, incidentally, need our help financially and otherwise. All need our prayers.

And then, finally, there is the negative witness from the grisly abortionist in Philadelphia as reported widely in the media. This man is being held for killing babies outside the womb, among other things, and perhaps this exposure will help people realize the truth that in any abortion clinic babies are being killed no matter how it is done. Add to that the positive witness of Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood leader, telling in her recent book, *Unplanned*, of her horror and revulsion when she saw via the ultrasound the actual killing of a baby in the womb. As she was seeing it, she wondered how she found herself in an abortion clinic

"living a lie, spreading a lie, and hurting the very women I wanted to help." Like many others who have seen the thing up close, she is now a strong voice for truth and life.

I began with Pope John Paul II and the triumphant Polish resistance to Communism he inspired. His biographer says that he himself saw a link there with the pro-life cause. "To him it was all one contest between the fight for freedom against the Communist culture of the lie and the defense of life against the culture of death." As hundreds of thousands marched for life in Washington this year on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, this encouraging link with the past was especially evident to one participant with good reason to see it. He was a young man, born and raised in Poland, who had seen a firm resistance to lies once before, and the liberating consequences. In a Catholic press report, he is quoted as saying, "This reminds me of my own country's Solidarity Movement where people came together to fight for a good and just cause." Yes, we have every good reason to hope, then, that the culture of death and its lies will one day fall before the witness of those fighting now for our good and just cause.

Fr. James Reidy is retired from the University of St. Thomas and serves as part-time associate at Holy Childhood Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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Family Life

Pope John Paul II: defender of human life, especially pre-born infants in the womb

By Mary Ann Kuharski



Kuharski

One of the most privileged and profound occasions I ever experienced came as a complete surprise!

John and I, along with our son Charlie and two pro-life friends, took a trip to Italy. This was a first for us, and truly a "dream come true." Our daughter Kari, then a student at the University of St. Thomas, was spending a semester in Rome as part of her studies. (It's funny how most of our kids became world travelers while John and I went no farther than the airport. But this time it was *our* turn!)

Thanks to the graciousness of Archbishop Harry Flynn, who wrote on our behalf because of our pro-life work, we were able to attend a General Audience with Pope John Paul II. It was a cool March day in 2003, and the audience was held outdoors. Along with thousands from countries across the globe, we applauded and cheered—some waving flags of their homeland—as the Holy Father in his "Popemobile" passed through the crowd.

We had two shopping bags brimming with Rosaries, sacred medals, prayer cards, and miniature statues that I had just purchased in one of the religious gift shops nearby. I couldn't wait to get back home to distribute all of the items blessed by Pope John Paul II to family and friends. (John was *more* concerned about how we were going to get it all into our suitcases and back on the plane—such a worrier!)

Two nights later we were preparing to leave Rome to see the sights of Florence and Venice before returning home. The phone rang in our son Charlie's room and the voice at the other end spoke in broken English, "If you are able to be at the Vatican by 6:30 A.M. tomorrow morning (you must go to the

big side doors by the Swiss Guards), your family is invited to attend Holy Mass with His Holiness Pope John Paul II."

What a surprise! We couldn't believe it! The next day we woke early and dressed in our "Sunday best." (I hoped the Holy Father wouldn't notice that my brown skirt did *not* match my flowered black top! Why had I left the black skirt at home? *Vanity! Vanity!*)

The six of us grabbed two taxis and headed for the Vatican. All the while, I sat in the backseat holding tight to a folder I had prepared, describing PRO-LIFE Across AMERICA's educational effort. I hoped to give it to one of the priests, or even to a guard, who might in turn pass it along to the Pope. Little did I dream that I would have that opportunity myself!

In the packet were color copies of some of the many PROLIFE Across AMERICA billboards which line the streets and highways featuring babies' faces, a pro-life message, and an 800 Hotline Number for help, linking callers to pregnancy support, adoption, or post-abortion services.

I wanted to tell the Holy Father that thanks to our supporters, *each year* PROLIFE Across AMERICA sponsors over 6,500 billboards in 41 states. More than that, I wanted to *thank him* for his tireless witness on behalf of the unborn and most vulnerable. It was Pope John Paul II's *Gospel of Life* which urged pro-life people to "create a new culture of life," a "culture of love."

It was the Holy Father's words, repeated time and time again, which reminded us of our goodness and encouraged us to never tire in our efforts to end the scourge of abortion that tainted our land. On a visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II proclaimed:

"We will stand up every time that human life is threatened.

"When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life.

"When a child is described as a burden or looked upon as a means to satisfy an emotional need, we will stand up and insist that every child is a unique and unrepeatable gift of God, with the right to love a loving and united family.

"When the sick, the aged, or the dying are abandoned in loneliness, we will stand up and proclaim that they are worthy of love, care, and respect." (Homily from Mass at the Mall in Washington, DC, October 7, 1979)

When we reached the side entrance of the Vatican, with its large gold doors and Swiss Guards in view, we exited the taxis and fumbled for the correct amount in Euros to pay our fares. Confusion reigned and in the process, my packet lay on the back seat of the cab. I didn't notice it wasn't with me until the taxis had sped off down the street.

It was my little "gift of humility." I would have no impressive packet with detailed information, no glossy photos of billboards, and no hand-written "Thank you, Holy Father" letter to offer the Pope. It all lay on the backseat of the yellow cab.

Once past the Swiss Guards, we were greeted by a Monsignor who directed us up two large marble staircases and into a waiting area, before being led to a small chapel nearby.

As we entered the Papal Chapel, our eyes fell on the white figure in a chair facing the Tabernacle. It was Pope John Paul II, deep in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. There was a presence of holiness so powerful that it filled the room.

No one spoke as we entered, quietly genuflected, and took our places on the small stools facing the altar. The chapel held no more than 25 people, and every chair was full. As I gazed around, there were priests, deacons, nuns, seminarians, and at least one Archbishop (now-Cardinal) from Germany. What an awesome privilege just to be in the room.

This day was no ordinary day. It was the first day of the war in Iraq and the distress on the Holy Father's face was

evident. During the Prayer of the Faithful, there was a special petition for peace in the Middle East.

After Mass, each one of us was invited to go up single file, be introduced to the Pope, and receive a Rosary and personal blessing. When it was my turn, I walked up and knelt down before the Holy Father. A sense of love seemed to exude from his very presence. Yet, for the first time as I saw him up close, I realized something else. He was suffering and in great physical pain. He was weak in appearance and his face was swollen, perhaps the residual effects of Parkinson's disease. Yet his eyes remained strong, his gaze fixed and loving. I resolved to pray harder for him from that day on.

As I knelt before him, I forgot about the brown skirt not matching the black jacket, and I forgot, too, about the well-prepared folder I left in the taxi. I could barely whisper but managed to mumble, "Holy Father, we are so grateful for your leadership and your tireless voice on behalf of the unborn and most vulnerable and defenseless."

He nodded approvingly and made the Sign of the Cross on my forehead. The tears flowed down my cheeks, as I parted and promised, "I will pray for you every day."

Pope John Paul II taught us how to live and how to die, as children of God. He taught us to cherish *all* life and to embrace suffering as a means of joining with Christ on the Cross. What a gift he was to our time!

Mary Ann Kuharski is a homemaker and mother of 13 (ages 20-40), six of whom came by adoption and are of mixed races, some with special needs. She is the author of Raising Catholic Children and Parenting with Prayer (OSV Press), and Building a Legacy of Love (Faith Publishing).



Pope John Paul the Great (soon-to-be Blessed Pope John Paul II), 1920-2005

By Fr. Michael Miller



Fr. Miller

On April 2, 2005, a great man left this world. Pope John Paul II, born Karol Wojtyla, died on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, a feast he instituted. As people throughout the world mourned his loss, many said that he should be called John Paul the Great. Only two popes out of 263 have earned this designation: St. Leo the Great (Pope from 440 to 461), and St. Gregory the Great (Pope from 590 to 604). The millions of people who went to Rome to pay their final respects are a testament to his greatness. I was in eighth grade when he became Pope and I had no idea what a great man had been chosen to be the

Vicar of Christ here on earth, and how deeply he would impact my life. George Weigel, the author of the definitive biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*, says, "The sheer drama of Karol Wojtyla's life would defy the imagination of the most fanciful screenwriter." (p. 2)

So many are discovering why he was such a great man. He was a theologian and philosopher, priest and bishop, poet and actor. His influence on world politics, especially the fall of Communism, is remarkable and indisputable. His writings are profound and prolific. His accomplishments as Pope in the life of the Church and the world are astounding. And yet what makes him so great, and such a hero to me, is the fact that he was a man of faith. "He can only be grasped and judged if one approaches him and accepts him for what he says he is: a man of faith, whose faith

is who he is." (*Witness to Hope*, p. 13) "His faith is not one facet of his personality or one dimension of his intellect. His faith is Karol Wojtyla at the most profound level of his personhood." (ibid. p. 10) When we find it difficult to live and believe our faith we can look at him and find courage. If he can believe, we can too. Intrinsic to being a man of faith is the fact that he was a man of prayer: the liturgy, the Rosary, contemplative prayer. Those who have seen him pray said that it was obvious he was speaking to God.

From his faith and prayer comes another of his characteristics: he was a man of hope, not fear. In his first address to the world as Pope, he said, "Be not afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To His saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development.

Be not afraid. Christ knows 'what is in man.' He alone knows it." For 26 and a half years (the third longest in history) he fearlessly led the Church, standing as a witness to hope and truth in the midst of a world that has lost sight of both. "If the Church of the future knows John Paul II as 'John Paul the Great,' it will be for this reason: at another moment of peril, when barbarisms of various sorts threatened civilization, a heroic figure was called from the Church to meet the barbarian threat and propose an alternative. In the case of Pope Leo the Great, the barbarians in question were Attila and his Huns. In the case of Gregory the Great, the barbarians were the Lombards. In the case of John Paul II, the barbarism threatening civilization has been a set of ideas whose consequences include barbarous politics... Against the new barbarisms set loose in the

world by absolutized fragments of truth, Karol Wojtyla preached a consistent message: "...you are greater than you imagine, and greater than the late modern world has let you imagine. By demonstrating, not merely asserting, that faith can transform the world, John Paul II helped restore a spiritual dimension to a history that had become flat, stale, and, as a consequence, brutal." (*Witness to Hope*, pp. 863-864) As time continues on we can acknowledge with greater gratitude and joy that a great prophet has been in our midst.

Fr. Michael Miller is pastor of St. Michael's Church and St. Mary's Church in Stillwater, Minnesota.

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Abby Johnson

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hood clinic director, who walked out on her job after being asked to assist in an abortion, spoke to ZENIT about the real needs of women in crisis and how being pro-life means truly educating people about their freedom and these choices that will determine their lives.

Johnson published the book "Unplanned" last month, in which she exposed the agenda of Planned Parenthood: to make money by pushing women to have abortions.

Now she is working with the pro-life organization, 40 Days For Life, which will begin another campaign on March 9 to prayerfully and peacefully reach out to women in need.

In this interview with ZENIT, Johnson reveals why the approach of 40 Days For Life has been uniquely successful, both in her own conversion and in the lives of others, and how the witness of pro-life workers attracted her to the Catholic Church.

ZENIT: The story of your change from the pro-choice to the pro-life "side of the fence" is both engaging and compelling. Going beyond those events, could you tell us now about your decision to become Catholic along with your husband this Easter?

Abby Johnson: My husband Doug and I had attended many churches before I left Planned Parenthood. We always preferred a more liturgical service over a contemporary one.

After I left Planned Parenthood, I was no longer welcome in my Episcopal Church and was pretty hurt by their decision for us to leave the church simply because I decided to no longer work for Planned Parenthood.

The day I left Planned Parenthood, I was embraced by the loving arms of the people who had prayed for me for years, most of whom are Catholic.

With the "help" of Planned Parenthood, I soon began to

speak at Catholic churches and at events with many Catholic attendees. [Editor's Note: Johnson explains in her book how the attempts of Planned Parenthood to silence its former employee paradoxically put the national spotlight on her story and led to media attention and speaking engagements in various venues.]

Not only that, but I was quickly gaining a circle of friends who were Catholic, and they would invite me to their churches.

After attending some various Catholic parishes, I fell in love with the liturgy and found myself wanting to learn more and more each day.

I found myself in awe of the devotion that my Catholic friends had that I didn't, and I knew I wanted that same devotion myself. Doug and I decided we want to be a part of what the Catholic Church stands for and we have found such purpose through the Church.

ZENIT: In your book, one thing that stands out is your compassion and real desire to help women in crisis, which once motivated you to work in the Planned Parenthood clinic. It seems that you found, however, that your attitude of Gospel charity had more resonance with the truth when you joined the pro-life cause. How has your understanding changed of what women in crisis really need?

Abby Johnson: Women in crisis do not need a "quick fix."

This quick fix usually comes with a lifetime of emotional pain — walking into a clinic as a mother and walking out no longer a mother will cause women and their families grief they never imagined.

I didn't realize this reality until I witnessed an ultrasound guided abortion myself. Seeing a perfectly formed body fleeing from the abortion instruments and then be torn apart "woke me up" in a sense.

I realized I wasn't helping women in crisis; I was piling another crisis on top of the crisis they were already facing!

These women need to be respected and given the time to walk them through each "choice" that is available along with its pros and cons.

They need compassion, a shoulder to cry on, a person to listen to them and most importantly, someone to stand up for them because they are better than abortion.

Abortion clinics are going to continue to pile crisis upon crisis for these women; we, as pro-lifers, will continue to offer them hope and a brighter future despite their crisis.

ZENIT: You have done a lot to expose the side of Planned Parenthood that is pushing abortions for economic reasons. What about its policies regarding the distribution of birth control? Has your opinion changed about the effectiveness of this means for "preventing unwanted pregnancies?"

Abby Johnson: While I was working at Planned Parenthood, I discovered that almost 60% of unplanned pregnancies happen with women who are using a form of birth control, one reason being that Planned Parenthood does not take the time to educate the women on their choice of birth control but rather distributes it like candy.

The fact that they don't take the time to explain the risks, complications and necessary components of the birth control that maintains its effectiveness causes many women to misuse their form of birth control, which results in an unplanned pregnancy.

Planned Parenthood, then, uses abortion as their back-up form of birth control.

I always stood up for birth control, because even while I was working at Planned Parenthood my personal goal was to reduce the number of abortions by providing affordable or free birth control to sexually active couples who were not ready to start a family.

Although I do not personally desire to use birth control due to medical risks and spiritual conviction; I understand

those who do and know that we as a society need to inform women about better options than hormonal birth control.

My recommendation to those looking to use a form of birth control is Natural Family Planning, which is a natural way to avoid unwanted/unexpected pregnancies without medication and medical procedures.

It is also a way to connect with your spouse on a very personal level where you both have an equal part in the fertility process.

[Editor's note: Natural Family Planning is not birth control, but a moral means of spacing birth according to the natural law.]

ZENIT: In your story, it was the unique approach of the 40 Days for Life campaign that touched your heart and enabled your conversion. What is it about this campaign that is so effective in promoting the pro-life cause?

Abby Johnson: 40 Days For Life is a campaign that holds 40 days of around-the-clock peaceful and prayerful vigils outside of abortion clinics.

Their focus is to be different than those who "picketed" abortion clinics years ago. Their focus is not to condemn or hate but to have a loving, peaceful and prayerful approach.

When pro-choicers and even abortion clinic workers see the efforts of the 40 Days For Life participants — that they are sincere, compassionate, and really want to help these women make the best decision — it awakens something in our hearts.

The 40 days of constant vigil is not just dedication but it is a cause going *further* than the efforts of the abortion industry to help these women.

They not only care about the medical well-being of the women who may or may not be pregnant, but they care about the emotional and spiritual well-being of the women too.

40 Days For Life is not just

"treating a patient;" they are caring about a soul. That is what makes 40 Days For Life so effective and makes it stand apart from the efforts of other organizations, including Planned Parenthood.

ZENIT: What would you most want pro-life people to learn from your story, regarding how to dialogue with pro-choice friends, family or colleagues?

Abby Johnson: The only way to communicate with pro-choice friends, family or colleagues is in a peaceful, prayerful and loving way. If you have read my book, the people who had a condemning presence outside of Planned Parenthood only drove me and my colleagues there to "protect" these women even more.

It was always the presence and the words from the peaceful, prayerful and loving people on the opposite side of the fence and abortion issue as me that made me think and even made me really enjoy them.

I knew they wanted the same thing that I did; they desperately wanted to help these women (even though I thought they were going about helping them in the wrong way). Despite my pro-choice mindset, these people stood out to me and their actions and words stuck with me, all the way to the day I left Planned Parenthood.

The most influential thing a pro-lifer can do is love, pray and have a peaceful presence at the clinics; one of the major reasons that I left Planned Parenthood and am actively standing up for life today is because of these attributes of certain pro-lifers that never gave up on me.

My words to every pro-lifer would be "Don't give up!" and present yourself in such a way that the Planned Parenthood workers/pro-choice advocates will be drawn to you and won't forget you, because that's what will change hearts.

This article was funded by the St. Benedict Chair of Writing sponsored by an anonymous patron.



Pope's humor

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least. Fr. Wojtyla had a priest-friend look it over and asked him what he thought. The priest said that it should be understandable when it gets translated into Polish.

Finally, when the Pope was the Cardinal-Archbishop of Krakow, the joke was that young priests should be obedient to their Archbishop, because, if they were not, the first punishment they would receive in Purgatory would be to read Cardinal Wojtyla's dissertation in philosophy.

Archbishop Timothy Dolan told about when Cardinal Wojtyla was made a new Pope,

one of his priest secretaries received an emergency telephone call in the middle of the night. He went to the Pope's bedroom to awaken him. He was not there. He went to the chapel. He didn't see the Pope there. He went to the library, the kitchen, and the bathroom. No Pope. In desperation, he awoke Fr. Dziwisz, the Pope's secretary, who had recently arrived from Poland.

"I can't find the Pope. There's an emergency phone call. Do you know where he might be?"

Fr. Dziwisz said, "Go to the chapel."

"I already did. He's not there," said the secretary.

"Look on the floor," said Fr. Dziwisz.

He went back to the chapel and found the Pope lying prostrate in prayer.

Another story came from John Cardinal O'Connor of New York who told about a private visit with Pope John Paul over lunch. The Cardinal was heading back to the United States from the Holy Land and was asked by the Pope to come to the Vatican in order to brief him about developments in the Middle East.

Cardinal O'Connor said that when the Pope and he were served lunch, the Pope asked a

question. Cardinal O'Connor gave a response that required a detailed answer. The Pope listened and continued eating; however, the Cardinal stopped eating to answer the question.

After three or four questions, the Pope was finished eating, but Cardinal O'Connor had taken only a few bites. Because the Pope had finished, the kitchen staff entered the dining room and whisked away the luncheon plates, and the meal was finished. Cardinal O'Connor quipped, "It's a good thing I didn't eat with him often, or I'd starve."

Of course, most people delight in the stories of Pope John Paul sneaking past Vatican se-

curity to go downhill snow skiing with priest friends. Supposedly, he would sit in the back seat of the car reading a newspaper in front of his face. One time a young lad recognized him at the bottom of a ski run and said, "Hey, that's the Pope!" An aide said, "You don't know what you're talking about." However, right after the discovery, the Pope exited the slopes.

Finally, an appropriate anecdote about the Pope who will be beatified on Divine Mercy Sunday. There was a priest from the United States

Pope's humor
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Pope John Paul II: understanding Mary as the model of the New Evangelization

By Douglas G. Bushman



Bushman

The teaching of Pope John Paul II on the Blessed Virgin Mary is inseparable from and indeed is integral to his commitment to lead the Church in the faithful interpretation and implementation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council through the promotion of the New Evangelization.

In his encyclical *Mother of the Redeemer*, Pope John Paul the Great expresses his hope that the doctrine on Mary taught by Vatican II should not only be known but lived. Genuine faith regarding Mary should be existential, that is, it should give meaning to one's life, inform one's consciousness, and be a constant source of reference in all that one does. The reason is that for Christians "to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), and Mary is the perfect model of the life of faith and participation in the life and mission of Christ.

When the doctrine about Mary is lived in a vital, personal relationship with the Lord, then faith develops into a Marian spirituality. This echoes the teaching of Vatican II: that true devotion to Mary leads to a deep "filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues."

The key to the mystery of Mary, the Holy Father explains, is her faith. By faith Mary entrusts herself totally to the love of God and she receives from Him the central role to play in the fulfillment of His plan of love for mankind. Her faith has two dimensions. By the grace of the Immaculate Conception her entire life—her every thought, word, and deed—is communion with

God. By the grace of the Divine Maternity she participates in God's merciful love and in the redemptive mission of her Son. She is the Mother of the Redeemer. Her entire being and the meaning of every event of her life derives from her communion with God and her vocation to be the unique associate of her Son in the mission of redemption.

A major implication of this for the Polish Pope is that by faith Mary is simultaneously close to God and close to man. Because Jesus is true God and true man, Mary's consent to be His Mother means that her faith draws her close to God and man at the same time. By loving her own Son with her whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, Mary's life is a perpetual fulfillment of the twofold command to love God and neighbor. As Pope John Paul writes in another encyclical, *Rich in Mercy*, as a result of the Incarnation, every approach to God must also be an approach to man, and every approach to man must be an approach to God. Christian faith and worship is certainly first of all directed to God, but because God loves all men, indeed, because the eternal love of the Father is directed to the Incarnate Son, we cannot be one with God without participating in His own solicitude for man. As Jesus said, the second commandment, love of neighbor, is like the first, love of God.

From this Pope John Paul draws a most important conclusion for the Church of our times. Just as Mary showed her feminine closeness to man—by caring for Jesus as He grew, by expressing concern over the lack of wine at the wedding at Cana, and by standing at the foot of the Cross—so the Church is called to live a maternal solicitude for all men and women whenever they lack anything essential to their dignity.

"Under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of both a virgin and a mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love. For that reason her heart must also have the inexhaustibility of a mother. The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him. It is in this that the mystery of the Mother consists. The Church, which looks to her with altogether special love and hope, wishes to make this mystery her own in an ever deeper manner." (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 22)

This leads us to the center of Pope John Paul's dedication of his pontificate to the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. What took place at the Council was a profound rediscovery of the Church's catholic dynamism, her missionary nature, in a word, her maternal vocation to be close to man. In Christ, God has drawn close to humanity, especially to the poor, and the poorest of the poor are sinners. Mary is the perfect model of what it means for Christ's disciples to draw close to humanity through, with, and in Him. Because by His mercy God draws close to humanity in Christ, Mary is rightly invoked as Mother of mercy.

As Mary remained united to her Son in His drawing close to humanity and this meant taking upon Himself the suffering of the world—so that she is also invoked as our Lady of Sorrows—so the mystery of God's drawing close to humanity continues in the Church especially in the sacrament of the Paschal Mystery, the Eucharist. For Mother Church, participation in the redemptive mission of Christ always means living with a soul pierced by the sword of sin. (see Lk. 2:35) The mystery of the Church is the mystery of man's participation in the love of God that suffers its own rejection by sin and yet continues to love "to the end." (Jn. 13:1) In the paschal love of Jesus made pre-

sent in the Eucharist, the Church daily experiences the maternal love of Mary who offered her Son to the Father for the redemption of the world. In the Eucharist the Mother embraces every human being in her love for the crucified Son, Whose redeeming mercy embraces all men.

Just as Christ the Redeemer came into the world through Mary, so the Church's mission and essential service to man is to bring Christ to the world throughout the ages. The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the vocation of Mary and the Church to manifest Jesus to the world so that all may come to faith in Him. In every Baptism, Christ is born spiritually in the souls of Mother Church's newly begotten children. Only, with the Fathers of the Church we must be attentive to this wrinkle in the analogy: while in ordinary birth a child passes from its mother's womb into the world, in the birth of Baptism people pass from the world into the protective and nourishing womb of their mother, the Church.

A category of person given particular prominence in the teaching of Vatican II and in the magisterium of Pope John Paul II is "the poor." In her profession of faith, the Magnificat, Mary sings of God's mercy shown to the lowly and hungry. In every generation the Church makes this prayer her own. Her vocation is to be close to man in every form of suffering, as Mary was close to Jesus as He suffered and died on the Cross. The Church "sees Mary deeply rooted in humanity's history, in man's eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for him from eternity. She sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; she sees her helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil." (*Redemptoris Mater*, n. 52)

The Church discovers her own mystery and mission in Mary, and learns that the greatest form of suffering for man is to be deprived of love. Made in the image of God, Who is love, man is made for love. His greatest need is to be taken into

the love of God, to know that he is loved by God, and to share that love with others. By faith, Mary and the Church know that the greatest assault on human dignity is sin, because sin is the rejection of God's love in an act of disobedience of a divine commandment. Sin says, in effect: "I can go it alone. I do not need God. I know better what will bring fulfillment." That is what the prodigal son thought.

Such thinking can only lead to the kind of destitution that the prodigal son experienced. This is the humanity towards which Mary and the Church draw close. Taking the maternal sensitivity and love of Mary as her model, the Church surveys the entire expanse of humanity in order to bring the love of God to those places and hearts where it is absent, where human dignity is most grievously threatened, where the darkness of sin eclipses the light of divine love. Her response is always the same: to give birth to Christ in hearts by faith and Baptism. Mary and the Church are mothers in the order of grace. The rediscovery of this mystery of maternal solicitude is the very soul of the renewal of Vatican II. Promoting the implementation of the Council, Pope John Paul II calls on us all to meditate on the mystery of Mary, who is close to God and to man by reason of her maternal love for Jesus. This twofold closeness to God and to man makes Mary the model of the New Evangelization. Participation in her mystery of maternal love and imitation of her virtues is the lifeblood of the New Evangelization.

Douglas G. Bushman, S.T.L., is Director of the Institute for Pastoral Theology of Ave Maria University.

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Pope's humor *continued from page 8*

who was to visit the Pope for a meeting, but he first went to a local church and recognized a beggar who happened to be an ex-priest. He told the Pope about the beggar, and the Pope asked the priest to bring the beggar to dinner with him.

At the dinner, Pope John Paul asked the priest to leave the dining room at the end of the meal, and he asked the beggar to hear his Confession. The

ex-priest protested that he was just a beggar. The Pope said, "So am I." Pope John Paul first heard the beggar's Confession and re-instated the priest, who heard the Pope's Confession. Then, the Holy Father asked the priest to return to the active priesthood and minister to the beggars in front of the church where the priest found him. The beggar returned to the priesthood.

A fitting story for a Pope who will be proclaimed "Blessed" on Divine Mercy Sunday!

John Sondag is Director of Religious Education at the Church of St. Helena in Minneapolis, Minnesota and publisher of "The Catholic Servant."

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

continued from page 1

was on the earth to do. She was fully alive, fully engaged with the people around her. She was so authentic in that she treated people the same. I saw her with President Reagan, I saw her with people dying of AIDS, and she was the same.

And I remember once when we were in this big building in Los Angeles in the lobby and people were swarming out, stockbrokers as well as the cafeteria workers, and she treated them all the same. So it was very impressive to see how Mother just had this beautiful presence with people.

"The Catholic Servant": Certainly you could say the same of good politicians, that they can have the same kind of presence to people. What would make her different? Could you sense a saintliness about her?

Jim Towey: She certainly had an aura of sanctity. She brought out the best in people around her. I remember one time a woman came up to Mother and said, "Mother Teresa, I met you at a conference in St. Louis, 15, 20 years earlier." And Mother looked at her and said, "I can't remember who I met yesterday." No politician would ever say that. But she said it in a way that was so disarming and humble and honest that it didn't offend the person.

I just think that she was in love with Jesus Christ and went about her daily work, and didn't worry about being popular. That wasn't a focus for her. She didn't want attention on herself. She hated the spotlight. She accepted the spotlight. But I think she was very much focused on what her life as a religious consisted of.

"The Catholic Servant": Was there anything that moved you to work with her? How did you get involved with working for Mother Teresa?

Jim Towey: I fell in love with her the second I saw her. She was just different from anybody that I had ever met.

She really was living the Gospel, I felt. And I wanted to be around her nuns, and all my free time they stole immediately when they saw I was available. So I met her in August, and by the middle of September I was hooked with the Missionaries of Charity, because when I came back from Calcutta, Mother had said, "Tell my sisters in Washington, 'Hello.'" I had no idea she had nuns in Washington. So I went up to their house—the sister that was superior there greeted me at the door and said, "Oh, you went and saw Mother," and she gathered the sisters around.... "Why don't you come Saturday morning and work in our soup kitchen?" I loved my Saturday mornings. I lived on Capitol Hill, I loved my routines, and I slept in. I thought, "Well, I'll go this one Saturday...." So I went that Saturday. But I was so impressed ... that I ended up going every Saturday after that. And I was hooked at that point.

"The Catholic Servant": You worked as a legal counsel for her?

Jim Towey: Yes. **"The Catholic Servant":** Why would Mother Teresa need a legal counsel?

Jim Towey: Three reasons. One, the nuns that she was sending to America needed immigration permission from the U.S. government. And back then, it [their early arrival into

the U.S.] was very complicated. After Mother died they passed the RV, the religious worker visa, in her honor. But while she was alive they made it miserable with getting a B1 or B2 visa for the sisters.

Second, she was opening a lot of homes, including AIDS homes that were controversial. Permitting issues, governmental relations issues—and so I was doing that for her.

Third, I protected the use of her name. She prohibited fundraising. And so my job was often to keep people from raising money in Mother's name, or otherwise appropriating her name. And there were a lot of cases like that.

"The Catholic Servant": Do the sisters still have somebody doing that?

Jim Towey: I still help the sisters, but it's amazing how sophisticated they've become in the ways of the world. When they first came they were strangers to America and really didn't know how the country worked. But now they do.

"The Catholic Servant": With Mother, you get some of these stories about bilocation and so forth. Is there any truth to that?

Jim Towey: I never heard of Mother bilocating. There were a lot of miracles that attended her life, medicines that would show up at the right moment, barriers that would be removed that everybody said weren't possible to be removed. When she went to Beirut to get some children

who were developmentally disabled out of a home that was right in the range of the gunfire, she said, "We'll pray for a cease fire," and there was a one-day ceasefire and she was able to go in and get all the kids out. And no one thought that was ever going to happen.... And I look at my life—and she changed the trajectory of my life. So I don't need to look too far to realize the difference she made in the world.

"The Catholic Servant": If you had one comment to make to other people about Mother Teresa, what would that be?

Jim Towey: I'll make two comments. One is Mother urged people to pray, to spend time with Jesus, and to hear the words of the Father: "That you are My delight, upon you My favor rests." There are the great graces of their Baptism. She urged people to pray and said, "If you're too busy to pray, you're too busy." In a world that's so hectic, I think Mother would want to tell them to slow it down and spend time with the Master.

Second, I think she would really urge them to love until it hurts. That she said that over and over, to love until it hurts,

to give without counting the cost, to be an agent of forgiveness in healing at home and in the world around you, to start with your own family members. So many good Catholics have, for whatever reason, learned to accept in their own homes a broken relationship. They've either withheld forgiveness or refuse to accept forgiveness. Mother would want these family wounds to heal because she really felt prayer began in the house and in the home.

So I think that focus on prayer and love was at the heart of what Mother lived. That's why on her tombstone in Calcutta—of all the passages that could have been put on her tombstone—the one that's chosen is from John's Gospel: "Love one another as I have loved you." (15:12)

John Sondag is Director of Religious Education at the Church of St. Helena in Minneapolis, Minnesota and publisher of "The Catholic Servant."

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Both St. Gemma Galgani and Pope John Paul II suffered for our Lord

By Kristen Lang



Lang

“...In her littleness and hiddenness, St. Gemma Galgani lived this work of reconciliation of man with God through participation in Christ’s Passion with special intensity: she did not contribute to it by devoting herself to special external activities, but through the total offering of herself. To all of you ... I want to offer her today as an example. May she inspire you from Heaven to an ever more intense need to offer yourselves for the salvation of humanity.” The littleness, the hiddenness, the offering of ourselves which our beloved late Holy Father spoke of regarding St. Gemma Galgani in 1989 reveal so much about his own life and sufferings. Those words paint the picture of a Pope who suffered for so many years before our eyes, and of a young girl who suffered in secret. And it was the suffering in St. Gemma’s life, offered in love to God, which became the

fire that perfected her soul.

On March 12, 1878, in the little town of Camigliano in Tuscany, Italy, a little girl was born to Henry and Aurelia Galgani. Gemma, as she was called, possessed an ardent faith from the time she was a very little girl. This faith was impressed upon her by her mother. It was during Gemma’s childhood that her mother contracted tuberculosis and died. But it was not to be her only meeting with death. A brother returned home from seminary and died of tuberculosis. By the time she was nineteen, she lost her father to cancer.

In the midst of grieving the loss of her father and brother, Gemma was also plagued by illness. Her foot required painful surgery, she later began to experience spinal problems, and, in 1899, she became seriously sick with spinal meningitis. Doctors soon lost hope. Gemma was given a book about Passionist Brother Gabriel Possenti, who had lived a holy life and had died some thirty years earlier. Gemma developed a deep devotion to him, and, when she was healed a short time later, the miracle was attributed to him.

On a Thursday evening in June of 1899, Gemma was in prayer when she received a vision. During this vision, Gemma was given the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ, which would reoccur every Thursday evening and last until midday on Friday. Even amidst such mystical experiences, daily life continued for her. Now that Gemma and her siblings were orphaned and destitute, they went to live with relatives. Not long after, she went to live with a devout family by the name of Giannini. She carried out her daily tasks with great love and devotion. Gemma longed to become a nun—her dearest desire was that a Passionist Convent be founded in which she was one of the sisters. Her aspiration, however, was not realized, because her health quickly deteriorated in 1903. Gemma was diagnosed with tuberculosis and suffered much, but did not ever complain. Her condition became increasingly worse and on Holy Saturday, April 11, 1903, Gemma died with a smile on her face. Pope Pius XI beatified her on May 14, 1933, and Pope Pius XII declared her a saint, canonizing her on May 2, 1940.

Pope John Paul II wrote a beautiful prayer for the one-hundredth anniversary of her death: “O Father, we ask You to establish Your dwelling in those who love You with a heart pure and simple, that through the example and the intercession of St. Gemma, we may live the pure Gospel and the mystery of a love crucified, to be the living image of Your Son. He Who lives and reigns, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.” St. Gemma Galgani, who accepted the events of life with patience and love, pray for us!

Kristen Lang is a freelance writer from Elk River, Minnesota.

This article was funded by the St. Bernadette of Soubirous Chair of Writing sponsored by Thomas and Barbara Janas.



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My encounter with Pope John Paul II

By Dale Ahlquist



I insisted on writing my own headline for this article. [Editor's note: That's why you'll notice one of the few times in this publication that the headline is too short and doesn't extend over the article.] If John Sondag had written the headline, as he usually does, he would have given everything away. He would have pointed out that I never had an encounter with Pope John Paul II. Never met him. Never saw him in person. All of which is true. But who would want to read an article with that announcement in the banner across the top?

The best I can claim is that I was once in the same city at the same time as Pope John Paul II. If I had known he was going to make a public appearance that day, I would certainly have been there and seen him in the flesh. I would also have seen him get shot. Did I mention that the city was Rome? And did I mention the day was May 13, 1981?

That's where I was and

when I was there, but I happened to be at a different St. Peter's that day: not the Basilica but the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains. I was looking at Michelangelo's amazing sculpture of Moses, his fingers entwined in his marble beard, the mistranslated horns on his head, and his literally stony stare. I was a tourist. I was not a Catholic. And what's more, I was on my honeymoon. Did I mention that my wife was with me, too?

Then came the shocking news from our tour guide: the Pope had been shot! As we all pressed forward to get more information which nobody had at that point, the tour guide informed my bride and me that the tour bus could not drive the two of us back to our hotel. It was too close to the Vatican. And so we walked back.

At first the streets were filled with chaos and sirens, but then everything became almost eerily still. As evening fell, everyone retreated inside to watch television and get updates on the day's tragic and incredible events.

We wandered through empty, quiet streets which gave the surreal impression of the great city of Rome being deserted.

We strolled along that famous river that runs through

Rome. And we crossed the bridge of the angels. It would be another sixteen years before I crossed the Tiber in a more figurative and theological sense. I would eventually learn that Rome was my home, but the irony was that my journey home began there. I just had to go all the way around the world to get back to where I belonged.

The next day—the next day—street vendors were selling postcards of the Pope waving from his hospital bed.

While I did not meet the Pope, I did, however, have a very close encounter with another great Catholic figure (and probable future saint), and he was the one who would guide me to the Catholic Church: G.K. Chesterton. Did I mention I read Chesterton for the first time ... on my honeymoon? As I always say, I've been married to Chesterton as long as I've been married to my wife. And as my wife always adds, the three of us get along very well.

Since the Pope and Chesterton both played a strange and startling role in my first trip to Rome, which paved the way for my true trip to Rome, and with John Paul II very fittingly being beatified on the Feast of the Divine Mercy, I thought I would tie these reflections to-

gether with a few of Chesterton's wonderful insights on the subject of mercy.

And I would start by pointing out something that Chesterton did not say, but would no doubt agree with: all mercy is Divine Mercy. It is a divine attribute. When we show mercy, we are carrying out the work of God.

Mercy comes from God. Where else could it possibly come from? As Chesterton says: "It is simply nonsense to suggest that the deduction from Darwinian evolution is, or has ever been thought to be, a moral in favour of mercy to all creatures. The whole point of the Darwinian vision of life, both pedantic and popular, was that no mercy really existed in the relations of any creatures. Some used this as a moral argument against nature; and some used it as a natural argument against morals. Some, like the great Huxley, said that we must prefer ethics to evolution. Some, like the insane Nietzsche, said we must prefer evolution to ethics."

One of Chesterton's earliest lines is: "Let us love mercy and walk humbly." It lays the ground for the goodness that would inform all his writing.

And one of his most amusing, but most profound lines is:

"Children are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy."

But I think his best insight is one that brings me back to that day in Rome, because it brings me back to the saint whose chains I stood beside, and whose monument served as the setting for his successor's brush with death. G.K. Chesterton writes about St. Peter and the strange spectacle of his martyrdom, being crucified upside down: "I've often fancied his humility was rewarded by seeing in death the beautiful vision of ... the landscape as it really is: with the stars like flowers, and the clouds like hills, and all men hanging on the mercy of God." Chesterton says it is an everlasting mercy that we don't fall off.

Dale Ahlquist is President of the American Chesterton Society and host of the EWTN series "G.K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense."

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